



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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EXTREMISM FASCIST VOIDS AND ANTIFASCIST HOPE WITH JOAN BRAUNE

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Joan Braune: Yeah, it's a huge anthology of pieces by various scholars and activists, some early career scholars, some people have been at this for quite a while, talking about the ethics of researching the far right. The other editors are Antonia Vaughn, Meghan Tinsley, and Aurelien Mondon. I feel really honored to be able to participate as much as I did, and I wish I'd done even more, but I'm glad to have been part of this really important project. I think one of the most important things that comes up in that book, for me at least, from the standpoint of my research, is really good critiques that people are doing a participant observation. Because oftentimes, in the social sciences you're trained to do participant observation, and the ethics of researching a group if you're an anthropologist trying to understand another culture... it's very different when you're talking about Nazis. You don't want to befriend them. You don't want to enter their worldview. You don't want to participate in their flyering and their marches and all of this stuff. You want to be careful that you're not actually helping them. You're actually researching them to undermine them, and it's important to have that sense of purpose, that this is not just an objective activity, like "Ah, these people seem interesting and peculiar. What is their culture?" But rather, putting your research in the service of the good of society and making sure that you're undermining the people you're researching has a different ethics to it than certain other kinds of research.

TFSR: Cool. When is that book slated to come out?

Joan Braune: Very soon, March. I forget what day in March, but in March.

TFSR: Folks can also find one of Joan's pieces in *¡No Pasarán!* through AK Press that came out October of 2022. But yeah, Joan, thank you again for participating in this conversation and contributing all these great ideas. I really appreciate it.

Joan Braune: Thank you so much. This was fun. Thanks for having me.

TFSR: My pleasure.

able to just do the work themselves. There are certainly pitfalls people fall into, but I've seen community after community drawing smart boundaries, protecting and caring for people who are being targeted, stating their values clearly, fighting for more than just their own defense, not falling into being on the backfoot constantly of defending themselves, but also fighting for a vision of a world they want. I think people really can do this work. So, I really try to encourage them to not feel like they need to be experts, or rely on experts, or rely on policing, or any of these institutions that we've been criticizing here. People do have the resources and the skill sets in their communities to do this work.

I think long term, if we want to do more than just sort of constantly play whack-a-mole on each new fascist incursion, we have to be thinking about what draws people into fascist movements. I think when we do the psychology piece correctly, we're not falling into liberalism, or we're not defending CVE programs. If we actually understand the ways in which people are grasping for meaning, and the ways in which that is accentuated by capitalism and by oppression in society. When I say that, I don't mean that fascists are poor, because they're often not. Oftentimes they are middle class, or... well middle class is a weird category, but they are often kids from suburbia, or sometimes they're rich like Stephen Miller, or whatever.

But I think the escape from freedom that people are falling into, the desire to find meaning, and the absence of that meaning, the absence of any social structures where people can come together and take care of one another, and explore meaning and purpose together, the absence of that social network in modern society is really leaving people grasping for a place to belong and for a story that gives their lives meaning. So, it's very important on the left, that we start creating, even more than we have thus far, spaces where people can come together and do that. I think that includes being open to the arts, to spirituality, and to philosophy, in the broad sense of these terms. Then also, can we come together and meet each other's needs, in the broader sense of needs.

So, some of that is aid. We think about the history of the Black Panther Party providing free lunches, that sort of programming is really important. One of the signs that I think that it's effective, is that the far-right tries to co-opt it, that we see militias and fascist organizations attempting to do these things, usually quite poorly, but occasionally well. So, we need to make sure we're not ceding that ground to them, that we are also engaged in the work of building now the systems and structures that we hope to see in the future.

TFSR: Joan, thank you very much for this conversation. Your next book is going to be coming out from University of Manchester, right? We're running short on time, but could you give a brief descriptor of what the book is and when it's going to be coming out?

An interview with Joan Braune, author of *Understanding and Countering Fascist Movements: From Void to Hope* out this year from Routledge. In this chat we talk about understanding fascism and fascists, motivations and deterrents, the framework of "deradicalization", the role of former fascists in education around fascism and the importance of fostering antifascist movements.

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TFSR: I'm joined by Joan Braune, author of *Understanding and Countering Fascist Movements: From Void to Hope* out this year from Routledge as well as the forthcoming *The Ethics of Researching the Far Right*. Joan is a lecturer in philosophy at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Thank you so much for joining me, Joan.

Joan Braune: Thanks for having me.

TFSR: My pleasure.

When thinking on show topics a few months ago, I got an itch to have an interview around the end of 2023, with the 2024 elections in mind, to chat on the show about fascist psychology and how white folks could talk to the racists that they might have in their extended family around the dinner table during that holiday-rich season at the end of the year. After this bounced around in my head a little bit, and I didn't really have any good examples of organizations to reach out to or individuals, I heard your chat Yeah Nah Pasaran! podcasts out of so-called Melbourne, and it really touched on some questions that have been wrestling with. I'm really happy to have gotten a chance to talk to you now and also to read your book.

Can you talk a bit about the working definition of fascism that you're employing in the book and what common liberal narratives miss when talking about fascists, their movements, and their motivations?

Joan Braune: Yes, so in the book I talk about fascism as having two dimensions that we need to understand simultaneously. Fascism is a social movement seeking power, and it's always already connected to sources of power, so that means it has media organs, it has candidates, it has money, it has networks of funding and advertising and sharing its ideas. And at the same time, fascism is also a movement that's composed of individuals who have particular reasons, both in terms of the structure of society and the structure of the economic system, and of oppression in society, and also their own personal life circumstances that are leading them into that movement. So essentially, I was arguing we have to look at both of these dimensions in order to defeat fascism in the long run.

Liberal conceptions of fascism often miss the degree to which it is connected to power and embedded in structures of oppression and violence in society. So, when we think about fields like "Hate Studies" or even "Terrorism Studies" (which is not what I do at all) we noticed that often these fields are very white, often they exclude a more structural or radical analysis, and there's a reason for that because of how fascism gets defined and seen as a form of extremism, or criminality, or something on the edge of society, or maybe just a sort of attitude that some people have that they can be trained out of. We're missing the structural element of that.

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wanting to give people a chance, and thinking that this is this heartwarming redemption story that will help people. I think people are just very naive about the harm you can actually do by taking someone who's been involved in that level of damage to other people and then holding them up and saying, "Look at this new source of information, this new expert, and their message." It can be really damaging.

I've also discouraged people at various points in time from inviting formers as speakers. I think everyone needs to be more reflective about that. Just because somebody has been out of the movement for 10, 20, or 30 years, does not mean they're an expert and does not mean they've processed, thought through, and understood what they were involved in and what they did. Even if they have endorsements from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, like Schoep, or the ADL, or some sort of highly established-seeming organization, that in itself also does not mean that there's any sort of guarantee that this person has done the work or can do it in a way that's not harmful to people.

TFSR: Remember kids, just because the story scratches that Dickens itch does that mean that it's true.

Joan Braune: Right.

TFSR: The society that we live in is alienating on a lot of different levels, and people process it in a lot of different ways. There's a strength in creating narratives that help people join together and figure out the stories that they're telling each other, hopefully stories that are based on reality and not just what immediately feels good. I think there's a lot of reasons that people get drawn towards belief sets that are different from societies, what the capitalist state in the US tells us as to why the world is the way it is and how to feel about how we feel about it. I think that you make the point in the book a few times, as well as at the beginning of this chat, none of us are just anti-fascist because we have a negative perception in our head of something that we're countering, but because we have visions of how the world could be.

Can you speak about examples that you've seen as successful in countering fascist organizing and defending the intended targets of fascist attention and violence? And Will you speak to the role of social movements constructing alternatives to the world that makes fascism currently prolific, hopefully making fascism impossible?

Joan Braune: Yes. When I look at individual community responses, I'm constantly impressed by how well local activist groups, just local people, who may not be highly experienced with researching fascist movements or anything like that, are

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and how we prevent it, and the morally superior approach, and how the individual heals who's been targeted by hate, then anyone who's questioning of the story of formers, or of the accountability level of formers, or the sincerity of a former, is then immediately suspect because they're seen as undermining the very thing that stops fascism and hate, which is forgiveness, right? Or compassion.

The compassion language... there are these compassion stories that I studied. It's also in the forthcoming *Ethics of Researching the Far-Right* book that I'm doing with some folks in the UK through University of Manchester Press. But the compassion narrative goes something like this: It's a genre of story told by almost every former, which begins with all of the problems in their life and trying to fulfill their needs by joining a hate group, becoming enraged, and then there's always some sort of point at which the compassionate outreach of someone from a group they were targeting and who they hated transforms their heart, right? So, they're shocked. There's this cognitive dissonance like, "How can this Jewish person be nice to me, a white person? Or how can this Black person be nice to me, a Nazi?" or whatever. Then there is this kind of shock and like, "Oh, I must be wrong about everything," then this dismantling of the worldview, and commitment to change and so forth.

Usually this is factually just not what happens. Not that people are necessarily lying, and in some cases, they're just sort of backfilling their memories with the story they've been told as the actual thing that happened. But it's much more complex than that. Usually, people's lives are falling apart. They're scared of going to jail, or their organization is disintegrating, or they're just completely burned out, or they want to be able to get a job, but they've been doxxed and this sort thing. People's lives are in disarray, and they're like, "Oh, maybe I should reevaluate my belief system." I think there's a lot of differences with addiction. I don't think hate is an addiction, but just like people hitting rock bottom with an addiction, it's more like that than it is this kind of compassionate outreach.

But when we keep feeding the public these stories and keep holding up formers as the experts on hate, what we're essentially telling people is, "The boundaries that are keeping your community safe are actually what's encouraging fascism. So, you need to do outreach to people who are highly dangerous. Or if you are not willing to do this kind of self-sacrificial, noble thing and reach out to Nazis, then you need to step back and let the only people who are able to do that, do that." Which just happens to turn out to be is soft power, and cops, and social workers, and people who are not fundamentally about empowering or liberating your community from the oppression it faces.

So, it's a very conservative, very disempowering narrative. It's very gaslighting, but it takes a while for people to see that and make that switch. I wish people would be more thoughtful about platforming formers. Whether it's a synagogue or university or whatever nonprofit, there's this wanting to show people kindness,

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So, in the book, I talk about fascist ideology and how it's difficult to define because fascists fundamentally are not entirely coherent in their worldview. There's some adaptability to the worldview. So, it's difficult to define it, and what I suggest is a kind of a grab bag approach, where you get a list of maybe 30 or so common properties, and you look at movements, and you look at historical events, and you start to see what these movements and events have in common. I would say, pretty crucial to fascism, is a belief in a natural hierarchy in the world. That some people are more worthy than others: stronger, better, more deserving of power. That some people are lower in that hierarchy and need to be subjugated or eliminated. And a belief that violence has a kind of cleansing power. That violence is not just a means to an end but a good in itself that can help these "correct people" come to power. Also, it has a cyclical vision of history. So, it believes that the world has to be destroyed and remade and that they're going to be the heroes that are at the vanguard of this destruction and rebirth.

I think that's a pretty good start. So, I looked at the worldview issues, the ideology issues, I looked at social movements, and then I tried to figure out kind of individually, how are all these things intersecting? How are individuals entering into these movements? Because I think we need to strategically be thinking about that so we can be preventing it. I think if we're thinking correctly about preventing it, it's not actually going to lead us to a focus on identifying people and surveilling and looking for radicalization factors, but it actually leads us to a more radical analysis of society and a critique of capitalism if we really understand the forces that are creating the alienation that makes people susceptible to this kind of recruitment.

TFSR: I guess on the individual side of it, yeah, I see what you mean around the criminalization of the subject that veers in this unhealthy or unsavory direction. There's also some psychologization of that individual. For instance, when there have been racist-motivated mass shootings, oftentimes the individual is declared to have mental health issues that's correlated with their political ideology. They may have both. Those may be two things that are going on, and I would argue that to do that to a lot of people says something about your mental stability, but it also makes it an easy to identify "other" that is well outside of the "safe boundaries" of how society operates.

I think the point that you make in the book about how we live in a society that is rife with misogyny, antisemitism, racism, white supremacy, settler colonialist society, I could go on... ableist. All of those feel like you can see those germinations fully blossoming in the fascist identity. Can you talk a little bit about how that part of the liberal analysis refuses to look in its own backyard or at its own roots?

Joan Braune: Right, yeah. I think both of those things can be looked at together.

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So, I come out of the tradition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. I wrote my dissertation on Erich Fromm, who was a psychoanalyst, as well as a Marxist philosopher and activist. I think if we look at what drives people, one of the ways we can get past the narrow focus on just defining fascism by a system of beliefs is we have to look at the fact that people are not fully honest with themselves or with the public about what's bringing them into these movements. So, there's an element of dishonesty that I think is very hard to unravel, even with formers who have left these movements. They don't always know how to analyze their own motivations because there's so much unconscious stuff going on and so much of a desire to justify violence or justify bullying.

But at the same time, yes, it's absolutely structural. There's a question about why this appears as what the philosopher William James calls a "live option." There are some things that are live options in our lives, and there are some that aren't. For example, it's just never occurred to me to convert to Hinduism. Nothing against it. It's just never occurred to me, right? But there are things in my life where I'm like, "Oh, I'm weighing these various possibilities." I come from an interfaith family. My mom's Jewish, and my dad's Catholic, so I've kind of thought about like, "Oh, which do I identify with or neither?" So why is fascism occurring to people as a live option in the political scene? It has to be able to resonate with people because these attitudes are more widespread in society than simply those who embrace this consciously.

When Fascists were talking about normalization and becoming "normal looking" and so forth early in the Trump administration, like covering up your tattoos, looking very clean cut, running for Republican offices, just being the boy or girl next door, that kind of thing. The reason they're able to do that is because we have already such deep racist, sexist, violent, antisemitic etc., ideology in our society. So, it's very easy for them to translate that into more acceptable political slogans like "Build the Wall." So, it's expressing attitudes that are already present and already empowered in society.

TFSR: Could you talk a little about the book and what methods you've used to obtain data on which you base your views on motivations and demotivations of fascists?

Joan Braune: Yeah, everything that I looked at was very public. I have great admiration for people that do underground investigation with Sock Puppet accounts and things like that, but I did not do that. I was looking at very public data, looking at people's YouTube videos, people's tweets, articles, I went back and read some of the literature that they've read, and some of their propaganda. I also did interview a few formers, but that was not particularly formative for the research.

A lot of my thinking about formers was based on critiquing and reading

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groups like **Light Upon Light** to launder individuals that continue the same activities and don't... to quote the slogan for One People Project, "If hate has consequences..." There's no consequences besides like five seconds of embarrassment saying, "I'm sorry that I did a thing... JK!"

It's a really easy thing for "formers" (the people claiming to be farmers), but it also lets the audience or the receiver of that narrative off of the hook. We get to feel good when we open up space and say, "They say that they're no longer this. So, let's give them a chance." By letting down our guard that opens us up. And particularly marginalized communities that are the targets of these people, it opens them up to more abuse and more disbelief. It's not restorative.

I just blathered about it, but if you could talk a little more about the "compassion narrative," as you call it and why it's promoted as the only appropriate social response, if the state is the criminal side of things, why it's okay for people to have a compassionate response, but it's not okay for other forms of resistance?

Joan Braune: The language of compassion and forgiveness, both of those terms have been very big in this deradicalization/CVE world. It was kind of the slogan or the mission statement for a while of Life After Hate, which was the first major deradicalization organization in the US and still exists but has split up in various different directions. I think that language is actually very potentially harmful. At first, I thought it was very sweet, when I was getting into this work seven or eight years ago. Then I started to see how that kind of language of compassion and forgiveness has been weaponized in various ways by the right and by people who are very naive about the kinds of boundaries that are needed to keep communities safe.

I totally agree with you (I guess I agree with myself because you were quoting me) [laughs], but I agree that forgiveness gets emphasized in a very Christian way. We could certainly create a more complex Christian understanding of what forgiveness is, but I think the naive understanding of forgiveness from a Christian perspective is that forgiveness is obligated morally, that everyone should be forgiven, certainly if they apologize they should be immediately forgiven, and that if you're not forgiving them immediately you're morally inferior in some way. And that also forgiveness is healing and beneficial for the person who forgives.

Which psychologically we know is not necessarily the case. People who've suffered abuse and trauma often forgiveness can make them feel unsafe, it can make them feel less worthy, it can de-legitimize their rightful anger that they're trying to process. Whether that's something that people want to work towards or not is an open question. But it would definitely be more about the individual, and it's definitely not how we fix a social problems like fascism. Then the dynamic plays out exactly as you said, where if forgiveness is held up, both as how we stop fascism

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Then Jeff Schoep, who you mentioned, who was head of the National Socialist Movement for 20 plus years, reached out to them also and tried to present himself as a former and then eventually moved away and formed his own network and his own platform. There's more to this story than I think we know. So, it's hard to say exactly what's going on with Schoep. But for many people a hard line is, "Did you rat out your buddies?" or "Did you try to dismantle and attack the group you were part of?" Schoep by a lot of standards has not done that. So for example, he continued to defend himself in the Charlottesville lawsuit and tried to not have to pay his portion, instead of working with the lawyers on lawsuit which you should do if you're a former and you're truly sorry for having participated in the Charlottesville hate March, you would want to help the people with their lawsuit and turn over information to them. That did not happen.

So that for a lot of people was like sign number one that this is not someone who can be trusted. Then he continues to promote with his new so-called "de-radicalization" platform, people that I would consider to be far-right. Like, there's this guy in the UK, who, as far as I can tell, just redefined himself, just switched on the topic of antisemitism, but still holds all of his other far-right views and very racist, very anti-immigrant. And Schoep is promoting him as a former and all of this stuff. It's very scary.

It's hard to get the timelines. I'll say this, because I don't want to say anything that I can't back up. It's very hard to get the timelines of when people are reaching out to somebody like Schoep and then when they're appearing on his podcast. It looks super-fast. Like there's one person I was just looking at actually the other day who was tweeting out fascist propaganda within the last month and now she's tweeting with Schoep that she's gonna be on the podcast apologizing within the next few weeks. That's soon, there's a process to this.

TFSR: Yeah, it's not like the Tweet Deck was just pre-loaded with this stuff and they forgot to turn them off like, "Oh, shoot, that's embarrassing." [laughs]

Joan Braune: I doubt it was that, yeah. I doubt that she forgot to click something. So, we'll see.

TFSR: A really good point that you make in the book is that a lot of the reasons that institutions that hold a lot of authority in our society say that forgiveness is, as you pointed out in the Ya No Pasaran! Discussion, which I thought was really on point, a very Christian value in a very shallow manner. It's promoted by these organizations, and it's a narrative that fits really well into the hegemonic discussion that our society has around participation, around belonging, around family, these sorts of things, and it allows

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the work people had written and seeing the gaps, seeing what wasn't addressed, the assumptions that were made and trying to question why those were being made. Looking, for example, at the ways people often interview formers and then just present the interview itself as evidence, like there is certainty that people are correct analyzing their own situation and analyzing the movements they're a part of. To some degree it's critical in that sense. I was doing kind of a critique of what I was reading and what was missing. Then also just looking at a ton of public material.

Also, I could say that I'm trained as a philosopher. I'm trained as a critical theorist and a philosopher. So, a lot of what I'm doing is analyzing ideas and trying to look at how people's ideas interact with their worldview and their social position and their psychology. So, it's more theoretical than it is quantitative or something. It's a qualitative study. It's theoretical.

TFSR: Some of the philosophers that you were pulling from also had done work around, including survey work, around fascists and their belief systems in the World War II and post-World War II era, right?

Joan Braune: Yeah. So, I used quite a bit of Fromm, and Fromm wrote a really interesting book called *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. He wrote a number of books on fascism, but that was his book where he really did a bunch of case studies of various Nazis. Some of them might be more legit than others. Apparently, he was a little naive about Albert Speer. But there's a lot of interesting data in that book, and there are a lot of other people doing that work. Fromm had a theory of social character, as he calls it, and he's really trying to find a way, theoretically, to get past both a really reductive kind of Marxism that would see people's social attitudes as just mechanically produced by their economic situation, and challenge the limitations of Freud and Freud's authoritarianism and sexism and so on, and try to find a way to think about how people's individual circumstances interact with their social circumstances. So, he's really good at that, and I was trying to do that a bit.

I also have a chapter drawing on Simone Weil who was a social critic and Christian mystic, but also coming out of a Jewish background like Fromm. And it was super interesting to see how they had a very similar analysis of fascism that they arrived at very independently of each other. They both saw certain factors in society causing alienation and a sense of void or absence in life that people were needing to fill and how fascism was offering to fill that for people and how the way that it was offering to fill that by just presenting an ideology as a solution to your life problems drives these cycles of violence as people become more determined to defend this thing that their whole life meeting depends upon.

TFSR: That void being in the subtitle *From Void to Hope*, right?

So, the concepts... I'm going to mix up whether Weil or Fromm had

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said which, because you kind of go back and forth between them. But that narrative, I think, is the narrative that somebody is drawn towards this extreme ideology very much based on a hole that's in themselves. It's very much a framework that we're told about when somebody chooses something that is outside of the norm. You were explaining that, in some terms, people might approach finding this void being told that they have this void, and having it explained to them what this void is by a fascist ideologue. The fascist creates this "idol" that they use to attempt to "compensate" the void. They try to fill the void with this version of themselves, this story, this identity of themselves, that they make up or that they accept... But that because fascism is one of constant destruction for the sake of creation, it just becomes a maw that opens wider and wider.

Does that about breakdown part of the idea of the critique of that approach towards identity?

Joan Braune: Yeah! One of the things I emphasize there is that there's a process of sort of waiting and uncertainty in determining your life identity. Especially if we're talking with people who are being recruited at really young ages, which is often the case—people are often joining these movements as teenagers or preteens. None of this excuses it in any way, of course. This is a life choice that people are making that they can and should be held accountable for and that causes tremendous harm.

But if we're trying to figure out how to prevent it, and understanding that dynamic, I think about young people and teenagers. Teenagers, for example, going to the mall and trying on a bunch of different outfits... It's like, "Am I a punk? Am I a goth?" You're trying on these identities. And part of becoming a mature person in the world is realizing that you can adopt that particular meaning or identity or whatever if you want, but it doesn't fundamentally solve the question of who you are. That's the choice that we have to make. It's some kind of existential choice that nobody can ultimately make for us.

So, I worry when I think about "deradicalization," which is not my favorite word, because I think radicalization is good if you're radicalizing in the right way. But when I think about deradicalization or getting people out of these movements, it feels like people are missing the fact that you don't arrive at an identity by just picking a different thing off the shelf or picking out a different set of clothes. That's kind of what got people into this in the first place. They're like, "I'm just going to pick this because this is going to give me an outlet for my rage, it's going to give me an explanation for a world that I find scary and confusing." I don't think we can just substitute that with something else. There's an element of having to learn to think for yourself and be patient with reality and explore. Fromm and Weil, I think, are very good at understanding that you can't just fill the void, you have to wait and see what appears and what appears to be true in your life.

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TFSR: Yeah, he's a National Syndicalist now or whatever. He was tabling some National Syndicalist stuff at the pro-Russia rally that happened in DC last year.

Joan Braune: Yeah. National Syndicalist, sounds like National Socialist, so creative! [laughs] Yeah, I just want to hammer that, because I don't want anyone to be confused that Matt Heimbach is even trying to not be a fascist. He's still a fascist. He's still organizing for fascism. I've been helped by Alexander Reid Ross's book, *Against the Fascist Creep*. I think it's really important to be aware of the way that fascism will try to masquerade as leftist, and I'm seeing, for example, fascist trying to capitalize on the war right now and trying to push antisemitism by claiming they're just anti-Zionist. Of course, anti-Zionism is not the same thing as antisemitism, but it can be. So, you got people exploiting this moment in that way.

Matt Heimbach was like really good at that. Traditionalist Workers Party in general was really trying to do that, really trying to say, "Oh, we're so concerned about workers, and we're so concerned about the poor," but it was a fascist, white supremacist group involved in Charlottesville, etc.

TFSR: You pointed out to that it was a Strasserite organization, which is the whole red/brown thing.

Joan Braune: Right. Which can be very confusing for people if they don't know to watch for that. So, I'll see people say things about fascist groups online or fascist figures and be like, "Oh, but they're right on this," or whatever. We have to be able to look at the whole picture and not just cherry pick issues. When Tucker Carlson was on Fox News, people periodically be like, "Oh, but you said this good thing!" But if you put it in the context of his entire worldview...

Matt Heimbach reached out to Light Upon Light some time ago, probably 2019, something like that. And Shane Burley did some digging and found the original letter that Heimbach sent to Light Upon Light in which he said, "I am not apologizing and will never apologize." In response to that letter, Light Upon Light, Jessie Morton, who's since passed, decided to immediately call up the New York Times and say, "I've got this amazing former for you. He's so famous, and you've got to interview Matt Heimbach." Literally, the guy is contacting Light Upon Light saying, "Yeah, I'm trying something new, but definitely never apologizing."

I don't know if we know the full story of what was going on with that and why he wanted to talk to Light Upon Light, but Light Upon Light was platforming various people that were far-right. So, it would have been a way for him to get a wider audience and not really change, just sort of redefine the name of his ideology, which he seems to be doing anyway. They routinely, for example, promoted this far-right incel podcast. They are a far-right group in lots of ways.

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and prior to that, too. You even go back to like the targeting of the Wobblies by the FBI, that kind of thing, suppression of labor movements and anarchist movements throughout US history. But it's been built up into this whole theory and this whole series of people doing research and these think tanks that do rely on a horseshoe theory that fail to look at ideology and have a whole bunch of justifications for why ideology and ideological differences should be ignored.

For example, one of the hot terms right now is accelerationism, and there's a whole new think tank that looks at what accelerationism might mean. Some of the research is good, but if we think about accelerationism as wanting to speed up change, or wanting to dramatically do some kind of upheaval, we can very quickly fail to make any sort of distinction between fascists, anarchists, communists, ISIS, Black Lives Matter, and so on. You just start lumping everything into this loose understanding that this is what the dangerous extremists look like: They have a utopian vision, they want immediate change, they think there are enemies, they feel under attack. You have to look at the actual details of people's beliefs and the reality of their situation. A white supremacist who feels under attack for being white and has a victim mentality is very different from a person who feels under attack because they really are under attack, because they're Black or trans or whatever, right?

If you're not doing that, if you're just looking at these sorts of general factors, then you're ignoring whether people are in touch with the truth, whether people are fighting for emancipation or for oppression, and all of those distinctions matter a lot.

TFSR: What is the role of formers in “deradicalization” as an industry or as a nonprofit sphere? Can you talk about some of the dangers of instilling the sort of power into the hands of “former fascists” that this can cause? I'd love if you could talk about Light Upon Light a little bit more with the Schoep and Heimbach debacle. I'll just say that at one point like two or three years ago I appeared on a David Rovics podcast as a guest. A couple of weeks later, there was a discussion about, “Well, David Rovics identifies as an anarchist, and here are some of the guests that David's had. Should David come on and maybe join some of the podcast networks that our project is a part of?” And someone was like, “David Rovics just had Matthew Heimbach of the Traditionalist Workers Party on the show saying that he was a former and dialoguing.” David's public discourse around people having concerns around this person not telling the truth and concerning platforming an individual who hasn't shown a lot of remorse or attempted to undo (if that's even possible) some of the harm that he's been involved with was pretty disdainful.

Joan Braune: Yeah, he's still a fascist.

TFSR: Or move through it. That was one way that it was put in the book that I really appreciated. Most of us have experienced, for instance, grief and loss. Everyone deals with it differently, but I found that the ways to do that are to just sort of like sit with it and then come out the other side. It's a part of you, it's not something that you move past necessarily, you put it in your bag of stuff that's on your back.

But if the fascist mentality or another identity is an avoidance of the complexity of life and the difficulty of having to create your own identity and think for yourself, as you say, or the fascist identities, I think as Fromm said, is an “escape from freedom,” then it's embracing that freedom, the responsibility that comes with it, and the scary beautiful part of having to actually construct a complex life, because this is the one you have to live.

Joan Braune: Absolutely. Yeah. I think grief and loss is such a great example of that. In my own research around fascism and some of the things that I've seen happen to people, I've had to grapple with some stuff myself. Nobody really prepared me for that. If you're training in maybe psychology or something like that, probably in graduate school, there's some course on what to do when the research gets sad. Nobody did that in philosophy, because they were just like, “Go read Immanuel Kant and tell us what it means.” So, I had to think a lot in my own life too about like, “How do we build community? How do we sustain? How do we find meaning when things are bleak?” I think that's really important for everyone, like it's an ongoing process, and our movements need to be thinking about that.

TFSR: Absolutely. So, one major critique that sparked my interest in that discussion on Yeah Nah Pasaran! was the development of a world of Countering Violent Extremism or CVE. Can you talk about that industry, its relation to police, military, and counterinsurgency studies harkening through and beyond the War on Terror era, and some of the concerns that you have around this framework for addressing fascist movements?

Joan Braune: Definitely. I think there's a real absence - not a total absence, but there's a need for more analysis on this. It's often kind of surprising to me how many antifascist news outlets and podcasts are kind of missing this, because there's often a critique of policing on the one hand, which is important and essential, and there's a critique of fascism on the other hand.

What we're missing sometimes is in between that space there is a whole industry, as you said, a whole network that includes government, law enforcement, militarism, of people who are doing both hard and soft power, as they would call it—sometimes the in-group language among these people is they're doing “squishy” methods. They're doing this kind of soft power counter radicalization, counter in-

surgency, trying to figure out how do we identify radicalization factors, this kind of language.

We've seen particularly scary versions of this in the UK, because the UK has a program called Prevent. Prevent is Islamophobic, it was from the start. It was very much focused on targeting Muslims. At various points in its history, it's tried to present itself as more neutral and as also targeting neo-Nazis. It's presented this targeting of neo-Nazis for surveillance or prevention as a way of saying, "Oh, we're not targeting Muslims," or "We're not targeting people of color." But of course, with any kind of program like this, it's primarily people of color and people from other marginalized communities that get targeted.

Essentially, what happens is people get tracked into the system of ongoing... I guess you could say surveillance, because you have to meet with social workers, you have to meet with psychologists and police. Often for a seven-year period you're left in this file system. So, there have been kids that have been tracked into this, because every doctor, every therapist, every teacher, is a mandated reporter of radicalization signs. There was like a little kid, for example, whose teacher asked like, "What would you do if you had a million dollars?" And the little kid said, "I would give alms to the poor." And the teacher heard that as "arms to the poor," and reported the kid to the government. And so the kid was in this system for years.

I've been talking to people in the UK that have been fighting this, and there are a lot of Muslim scholars there that are doing amazing work. We need to be watching that this kind of thing is not spreading and worsening. It definitely is. We're seeing this kind of thing all over the place. Definitely scary watching the Stop Cop City protesters being labeled as domestic terrorists. That kind of language, even when it's not a criminal charge or criminal classification, is something we need to be super careful about on the left, because oftentimes, you'll hear these appeals when there's a mass shooting, or something like that, people will say, "Well, we need to call this what it is. We need to call it terrorism. We need to call it radicalization. We need to call it extremism. It's not just ISIS and so forth. White supremacist are terrorists, they're extremists!" That's not always helpful, because what you're doing is you're just creating further empowerment of a system that tracks and surveillance Muslims, people of color, and others.

TFSR: Particularly in that instance too, when those terrorism charges that are being brought, the state of Georgia created the category of "terrorist" that's being applied to the Stop Cop City protestors in response to the shooting in South Carolina that Dylann Roof conducted at the Emanuel AME Church of Black parishioners. A literal white supremacist, incel, bowl cut-head kid goes in, after attending a few Bible study meetings with folks, with weapons and does this, and now this is being applied against people that are that have not hurt anyone that are blocking the construction of

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perience, he was just a newscaster, but was elected by a Republican base based on promising to drive the homeless out of town.

TFSR: It's a distinctly American problem, I think. Just to touch back on Matt Shea. I was trying to look it up really quick. I think Matt Shea was the focus of the sequel to the Bundyville podcast series that came out from Oregon Public Radio, Bundyville: The Remnant, which I would suggest listeners listen to. I thought it was really well produced.

Joan Braune: Yeah, it's very good. Leah Sottile is a journalist from Spokane. She did some really great research on Matt Shea. Also, Jason Wilson in The Guardian played a huge role in exposing Matt Shea's shenanigans.

TFSR: I'll link those folks in the show notes. We've already kind of touched on it, but in the book, you take umbrage on employing terms like radicalization and extremism when either individuals or when the government or nonprofits or whatever define fascistic movements, groups, or individuals in those sorts of ways. Myself as an antigovernment extremist in support of organizing by Black identity extremists also have some concerns. I wonder if you could talk about the stickiness of those terms—radicalization and extremism—and what that means to other forms of organizing or visions of the world, like leftists, for instance.

Joan Braune: Definitely, it's based on a very Cold War mentality. There was originally an anti-communist Cold War mentality that, basically, anyone on the left can be equated on this ideological view with anyone on the extreme or far-right, that fascists and communists are sort of equated as basically the same. Extremism comes out of that.

TFSR: The horseshoe theory.

Joan Braune: Yeah, the horseshoe theory. Exactly, yeah. There was a book that was very popular in the 50s by this guy Eric Hoffer called The True Believer. There are a few things in the book that I think are kind of insightful, but communists and fascists are identical to him. So, everyone in both of these categories has a black and white worldview, is scared of outside information, inherently violent, all of this stuff, right. So, it's early radicalization factors theory, which is usually basically junk science. Hoffer did not do any empirical research to come up with this list. It was based on his reading of books and his personal reflection. He was just a working-class guy, which makes me want to like him, but it's a terrible book.

So, this has just developed over the decades, coming out of the Cold War,

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up and... I think the FBI infiltrated and just brought charges against one militia person for having explosives. I think that they were meaning to start some sort of conflict that would force the federal government's hands.

Joan Braune: One thing that I think people should start looking at, by the way... somebody's got to do a project looking at targeting of the homeless. Or the unhoused. Because that's a space where I think there's not enough research being done. And a lot of people think that it's one of those things that just gets categorized as crime rather than hate crime, and so it doesn't get tracked and looked at as fascist activity. But even when you're on websites, like Next Door, or these Neighborhood Watch websites, you can see people promoting attacks and fascist activity.

I have a sociologist friend who did her dissertation on looking at a Facebook group that was just like photographing homeless people and basically targeting homeless people. So even just a small neighborhood of people who are like, "We're gonna go down there with our guns on our motorcycles," and then how do the cops react? And how does the city react? It's just a space where people are very vulnerable.

TFSR: It's also oftentimes around rhetoric of public health as well as small business operation, and there's all sorts of directions you could go about pointing to the fascistic. Here we've got non-institutional organizations, just like gatherings of people on social media that coordinate and fundraise around increasing police on the streets and increasing police budgets and attempting to coordinate businesses to complain about how "dangerous" downtown Asheville is, because there's people spanging or street musicians. So, it's never a discussion of, "Hey, how come there are so many people that are homeless in your community? How come there's no public restrooms? How come there's no resources available for people like drop-in centers, addiction help, or public mental health if that that is a concern of yours?" Instead, it's about "These people are scaring away my customers."

Joan Braune: Yeah, I talked a little bit in the book about this documentary that was put out by a news channel in Seattle called Seattle is Dying. Deeply fascistic, if people know what to look for in fascist propaganda. The homeless are referred to as animals. The heroes are these small business owners, these upstanding disempowered small business owners who are producing all of the wealth in society and they're just not being protected from these animal-like homeless people. It was such fascist rhetoric.

Then we had our own version of it put out here in Spokane the following year, a Spokane documentary attacking the homeless. And it led to the election of a mayor whose entire platform was just targeting the homeless. He had no ex-

an institution that is inherently violent against people of color in a Black neighborhood.

Joan Braune: That's absolutely right. That kind of language is always gonna get weaponized. When we're thinking about soft power, first of all, we can't be taking grants from the Department of Homeland Security. I'm sorry, but I've run into so many nice nonprofits trying to figure out how to survive that are doing work against hate in their communities that are like, "Ah, the sparkly money!" You cannot take that money. You cannot take that counter extremism, Countering Violent Extremism, CVE money. Now they're calling it something else—targeted violence prevention. It's the same thing.

When there are petitions signed by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Brennan Center for Justice, all of these organizations that track civil liberties and work on civil liberties for marginalized communities saying, "Please do not take this money." When you take that money, you're breaking the trust that you should be building with communities under attack. That's also been an ongoing conversation that I keep having with different people in the world of research and activism around hate groups. Please do not take that money. It's counter to what your mission professes to be, for many of these organizations.

Then you get these really weird astroturf counterinsurgency type things popping up that are funded by these programs, DHS money. A thing I think is very peculiar that I've not done a lot of research on yet, but there's a network called Cure Portland or Cure PDX, and it's an offshoot of Parallel Networks which was the group that founded Light Upon Light, which I think we were going to get to later, but Light Upon Light was this extremely sketchy alleged deradicalization group that actually ended up whitewashing the reputations of various active fascists and neo-Nazis like Matt heimbach.

It was co-founded by this guy Jesse Morton, who was former supporter of a fundamentalist Muslim propaganda outlet who had gone to prison and had gotten a deal and gotten released, and who was rather unstable, to be to be generous. I've heard all kinds of things about Jesse Morton. But Jesse Morton passed a few years ago. It was co-founded by Jesse Morton and a guy from the New York City Police Department, Mitch Silber. They created this group Parallel Networks, and then it was called Light Upon Light.

The latest iteration of that project is called Cure Portland, and it focuses on Portland. It's basically squishy, soft counterinsurgency, like "We're going to talk about how to make sure the antifascists and the fascists get along. Nobody punches anybody, everybody finds ways to talk to each other productively." And you simply can't fix fascism with dialogue and reaching across the aisle. That's not how you address a social movement that wants to eliminate people. So, there are certainly a range of tactics you can use, but it's definitely more than understanding one another.

er's worldview, respect, and dialogue. It's very naive and really pretty dangerous to teach people that that's fundamentally how social change happens.

TFSR: That made me think, dating back to the 90s, the *It Did Happen Here* podcast and book talk a bit about the police approaches towards, in particular, anti-racist skinheads at a time when there was a lot of violent fascist skinhead organizing, and not just skinheads but racist organizing. The clashes that would occur between them for control over social scenes or cultural centers and spaces, as well as for the like self-defense and also the defense of marginalized and targeted communities. The police were literally claiming that they were looking at this as being a skinhead or a "gang problem" and not an issue of a fascist insurgency that is targeting specific parts of the population, racialized or gendered parts of the population, that they had a problem with. Similarly, these are echoes of the past, it seems.

Joan Braune: Yeah, it's not new. I think it just gets constantly rebranded. After 9/11, it was able to get support from some liberals because it was presented as this, "We can prevent these things without going to war. We're just going to surveil people, we're going to look for these things, and then we're gonna very gently make them talk to social workers or something... or we're going to arrest them." Soft power is still part of the same system. You're not defeating fascism if you continue to support the same institutions that target the same people fascism targets. I think it's good to use the term "gangs," because that's an issue too, viewing it just as if it's gangs. Even though police departments don't seem to treat these things as gangs, normally—they're not in the "gang databases" usually or whatever. Insisting that "these things really are gangs too" is the same sort of language that I hear that's problematic, where people are saying "it really is terrorism too." And then you just expand these problematic gang databases, you expand the problematic targeting and prosecution and so on of people of color and others.

TFSR: Yeah. And having talked to some anarchists and antifascists in prison too, more and more they're coming across... and this is not a new thing—the Oregon Department of Corrections was doing this in in the late 90s/early 2000s of criminalizing people who have used a circle A on their literature or letters or whatever as the part of the "anarchist gang." Apparently, they're doing this in Ohio and other places.

Joan Braune: I've seen people do that. I've seen cops give those kinds of presentations. There's a conference now called Eradicate Hate that I refuse to go to, but it's held every year in Pittsburgh now. I heard some horror stories from the first one. But that aside, even if they get better at managing, making sure that no one is

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harmd in any kind of terrible way, if you look at that lineup of people... there are some people on the list of speakers that they invite that are pretty good, but it's very heavily white, it's very heavily law enforcement focused, it's very heavily focused on CVE and groups like Parents for Peace are sort of held up as the solution, that these deradicalization groups are going to save us.

TFSR: Yeah, it seems like the harms that are allowed are the ones that are institutionalized and publicly funded...

This is totally off topic, but I remember seeing this last week, in New York, Guardian Angels, which is a thing that I had not heard about as an organization for a couple of decades, but I remember them being touted as an autonomous community response in Los Angeles and other places where there was viewed to be a lot of street violence going on. Basically, a paramilitary street fighting response to public crime fears, a bunch of biker dudes wearing the same jackets and little berets, like purple berets walking around and intimidating people. They seem to get a lot of institutional support, and they're basically jackbooted thugs that tend to focus on the same marginalized communities that are always accused of being the sources of criminality in our society. I don't know...

Joan Braune: I've got to think about how to connect it a little bit, because some of the people I'm criticizing in the CVE world would shun that sort of approach as extremism in itself. But one of the signs of fascism that a lot of people look for is, "Do you have paramilitaries?" and gosh, that is...

TFSR: Is it the Guardian Angels, is the Proud Boys that politicians are using is their personal security?

Joan Braune: Exactly. Like, Matt Shea, who was a local politician and State legislator here, who's now a pastor with I don't think any kind of pastoral training, but just decided to transition from one to the other as part of his Christian nationalist agenda. I definitely remember people like saying he's guarded by militia. There's a lot of militia activity up here in general. I'm in the Pacific Northwest, and militias get involved with politicians. They get involved with political organizations. And when you look at what's happening on the border in Texas right now, that kind of thing is really, really scary to me to see the National Guard teaming up with whatever the newest version of the Minutemen is, these self-deputized border guards.

TFSR: This was happening, particularly at Eagle Pass, where there were militia coming. I know that there were militia from North Carolina that were showing up out there and giving aid to the police, but also showing

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